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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000852

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TAGS: PGOV PK PREL

SUBJECT: MQM WAITING FOR PPP'S CALL

REF: KARACHI 141

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Karachi-based Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leader Farooq Sattar asked Ambassador February 26 to push subtly for his party's inclusion in any Pakistan People's Party-led government. Sattar highlighted his party's secular, pro-western policies and suggested the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had an "anti-Musharraf agenda." Whether in or out of government, Sattar insisted that his party be consulted on matters related to Karachi and other party strongholds in Sindh province. Sattar expected a PPP delegation to visit MQM party headquarters in Karachi by the end of the week for "comprehensive" discussions. At a "surprise" press gathering after the lunch, Ambassador reiterated that we meet with all political parties and will work with leaders elected by the Pakistani people. End summary.

"Not Ministries, Policies"

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¶2. (C) Ambassador met February 26 in Islamabad with Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) in-country leader Farooq Sattar. Also attending the lunch were three newly-elected, western-educated National Assembly members, whom he hoped would help convey the "modern face" of his party.

¶3. (C) While Farooq insisted the MQM was prepared to serve in the opposition at the national and provincial (Sindh) level, he hoped that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would instead bring the MQM into its ruling coalition. Asked directly about which federal ministries his party would demand in exchange for its estimated 25 National Assembly (and 9 Senate) votes, Sattar countered that MQM was more interested in the new government's agenda than in identifying ministries at this point.

¶4. (C) The MQM's priorities, Sattar said, would include: (1) anti-militancy/anti-extremism; (2) promotion of peace/stability; (3) encouraging economic development; (4) supporting provincial autonomy; and (5) advancing talks with India on Kashmir. Sattar noted that MQM leader Altaf Hussain, calling from London, was the first party leader to congratulate Zardari on the PPP's victory. Despite his party's troubled past with both the PPP and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Hussain had pledged his party's "unconditional support" for a PPP/PML-N coalition.

## Suspicion of Nawaz

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¶ 15. (C) However, Farooq warned the Ambassador that any coalition which included Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) would be short-lived, a "Pandora's box." In his opinion -- if the partnership even lasted to the first sitting of parliament -- PML-N's Nawaz Sharif would engage in "treachery" during the first 100 days, waging a "personal vendetta against Musharraf" by demanding curbs on his presidential powers and the ouster of the new Supreme Court and provincial High Court judges. The MQM had no interest in this agenda.

¶ 16. (C) The MQM participated in Nawaz's first government, and he "treated us like tissue paper," Sattar commented. That government did not last long after the MQM withdrew, Sattar sneered. He said the MQM was treated even worse during Nawaz's second premiership, likening government actions then to "state-sponsored terrorism." This background from the 1990s explained MQM's joining the Musharraf governments, and consequently, Nawaz's demand now that any GOP exclude his party.

"Forgive and Forget"

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¶ 17. (C) Sattar expected a PPP delegation to visit MQM party headquarters in Karachi by the end of the week. Party talks would be "comprehensive," encompassing the formation of governments in Sindh province and at the federal level. The PPP "cannot disregard our mandate," Sattar emphasized. He claimed that Benazir Bhutto, prior to her assassination, had

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promised Hussain that the MQM would be accepted by the PPP as a "national partner." Parliamentarian Haider Rizvi added, "They need our votes, and they become more expensive with time."

¶ 18. (C) The MQM has a policy of "forgive and forget" vis-a-vis the PPP, Sattar claimed, though Bhutto's premierships during the 1990s were no better than Nawaz's. Sattar said that as many as 15,000 MQM party workers, supporters and their families had died in Karachi due to inter-party violence.

¶ 19. (C) The PPP-led Sindh government had unwisely "pushed the MQM to the wall," ignoring urban Sindh for rural Sindh. Whether in government or in opposition, the MQM would expect to be consulted on policies related to its constituencies (Karachi and Hyderabad), Sattar demanded. Rizvi inserted: "This is not a threat, it is a reality." Some of the names on PPP's short list for Sindh Chief Minister were positive, Sattar added, "others" were decidedly not.

Old Acquaintances

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¶ 10. (C) Sattar commented that his party's alliance with Musharraf was "comfortable," but his Pakistan Muslim League (PML) was more a "party of convenience" than a true partner. He said the PML lost because of Musharraf's "democratic deficit." Musharraf's re-election by the old parliament had been "ill-conceived."

¶ 11. (C) However, Sattar believed Musharraf's approval rating would start to go up: he had resigned from the Army and the elections had been free and fair. Additionally, the Army as an institution was returning to the barracks. This progress notwithstanding, he warned that the Army would not cut its ties to Musharraf as quickly or easily as many were predicting.

¶ 12. (C) Comment: The following day, PPP Prime Minister candidate Amin Faheem publicly supported inclusion of the MQM in the new national government, but PPP Co-Chair Zardari is

facing broad rank and file opposition to the idea of reaching out to a Musharraf partner. We believe that inclusion of the MQM in the provisional government would reduce the prospects of renewed violence in Karachi. At the national level, the PPP will need the MQM if it wants to break PML-Q's current majority in the Senate. End comment.

PATTERSON